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SUBJECT: 2007 DAKAR CRISIS MANAGEMENT EXERCISE: LESSONS
LEARNED

REF: Houge-Braxton email of March 15, 2007

¶1. Post wishes to thank FSI for a successful crisis management exercise (CME). The timing of the exercise was excellent as Senegal prepared for its presidential elections in late February. The exercise enhanced post's crisis management preparedness and prepared post for the February crisis that unfolded in neighboring Guinea which involved the ordered departure of direct-hire employees, eligible family members (EFMs) and private Americans to the U.S. through Dakar.

¶2. The following responses are keyed to ref email paragraph two:

¶A. Post found that the training format suited post's needs. Post worked closely with the trainer before his arrival in Dakar to customize the scenarios and to use the trainer for additional briefings. Due to an overwhelming mission wide interest in the training, post management decided to hold two crisis overview sessions and opened the crisis management exercise to American citizen community representatives who appreciated being included and greatly benefited from the exercise. Many participants in the overview sessions were new to crisis management and learned important terms and concepts which enhanced the actual exercise. The time allotted for the exercise allowed the scenario to unfold in many unforeseen directions, but did not run so long as to cause participants to lose focus.

Despite an overwhelming presence in the exercise, the Locally Engaged Staff (LES) in attendance did not actively participate. Post believes that at the next CME, the moderator or the Emergency Action Committee (EAC) chairperson could play a more active role to engage them in the debate, both to seek their assessment of the theoretical situation and to underscore how they fit in the picture.

One suggestion would be to target one LES as being at the center of a situation where one hostile group would only negotiate with a Senegalese staff member rather than with an American official. Another suggestion would be to hold a separate crisis management exercise involving only LES, following the overview session. Post believes that a session targeting LES might prime them for better participation in the final exercise.

¶B. The scenarios were very well written, and it was clear that the trainer had studied the history and current politics of Senegal. However, some participants commented that there were too many situations that developed very quickly and covering them in the limited timeframe proved challenging. Post suggests that during the next CME, instead of having seven situations that lead to one major attack at the end, it would be better to have 4 to 5 situations. That would make the scenario more realistic and manageable during the exercise.

The last minutes of the exercise were devoted to taking care of our own people during and after a crisis. The presentation by a Mission

member on her experience with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder highlighted how important it is to keep each other safe, secure, and productive in a stressful situation. Post realizes that getting the job done and taking care of employees under conditions of severe, long lasting stress can be one of the most difficult challenges a manager may face. As a result, knowing how to staff a crisis is crucial, especially when primary officers are unavailable or incapacitated. The recognition that crises are often of long duration mandates that Post have a deep list of those who are ready and may be called upon to replace those suffering from stress and fatigue.

¶C. Mr. Michael Braxton's intervention in the exercise was appropriate and well timed. The Ambassador participated in the exercise and expressed her overall satisfaction with both CME and the overview sessions. She was also happy to receive an out brief from the trainer on the trainer's other briefings and his overall observations during his week in Dakar. Post management was especially pleased that the trainer held meetings with the health unit, consular section and eligible family members.

¶D. The exercise highlighted the need to make EAP available to all mission employees, especially to LES. One of post's objectives for the exercise was to prepare the Mission for any potential violence possibly erupting before or after the February 25 presidential elections. In addition, given the political unrest in neighboring Guinea, post management used this opportunity to educate mission employees on their roles in helping a neighboring embassy in a crisis (as demonstrated during the ordered EFM departure from Conakry). The exercise was also useful in explaining and reviewing tripwires and how important it is to keep them updated.

¶E. Recognizing that emergency planning is a mission wide priority and shared responsibility, post will adapt its new arrival security

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briefing to include an introduction to the EAP. Post will also make EAP available to all mission employees on the intranet and encourage all sections chiefs to share it with American direct hire employees and LES.

¶F. As stated in para. A, post believes that a separate CME session for LES as a follow up to the overview training would greatly improve the LES's understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the event of a crisis. A preliminary LES-only session could build confidence in their crisis management abilities and reduce apprehensions about voicing ideas in the presence of direct hire supervisors. An alternative to having a CME tailored to LES would be for post management to organize mini CMEs with scenarios developed in house.

¶G. Post is satisfied with the frequency of the current CME rotation.

¶H. Post appreciates Mr. Braxton's excellent presentations and willingness to work with various audiences during his stay.

Jacobs